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Letter dated 10 July 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit the assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Mexico in February 2002 (see annex). The assessment was prepared pursuant to the note by the President of the Security Council dated 12 June 1997 (S/1997/451).

I would be grateful if this letter and the attached assessment could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Adolfo **Aguilar Zinser**
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Annex to the letter dated 10 July 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Mexico (February 2002)

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I. Introduction

1. The Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations, represented by Ambassador Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, held the presidency of the Security Council during February 2002. Mexico's presidency, after nearly 20 years of absence, was characterized by the launching of an intensive programme of work. In addition to informal consultations, which have been the usual procedure for taking decisions in the Council, a total of 12 public meetings and four closed meetings were held, and new working methods were adopted. During the month, a mission composed of all the members of the Council visited Ethiopia and Eritrea to reinforce the border demarcation process, and the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

2. All the activities of the Mexican presidency were conducted with full transparency, in fulfilment of one of our country's main promises during its campaign for the votes of all Member States of the United Nations. Although transparency is a working premise and an objective adhered to by all members of the Council, in practice there is always a certain tension between the desire to have comprehensive debates and the resistance to prolonged meetings. The Mexican presidency decided to propose and adopt pragmatic solutions for each case, continually seeking a balance between transparency and effectiveness; between the desire to maintain and expand opportunities for all Member States to express their views and the need to function as efficiently as possible.

3. On the basis of these criteria, Mexico's presidency resorted to a number of different formulas for conducting the work of the Security Council. These included, as far as possible, the presentation of reports by the Secretary-General at public meetings; the distinction during informal consultations between briefings and exchanges of views; and the organization of interactive debates, both in public meetings and in informal consultations. Guidelines were issued for the meeting held in order to assess the work of the Security Council, which included limiting the amount of time allowed for each delegation to speak.

4. In addition, an open-door policy was followed with all Member States, especially those whose interests were being discussed by the Council. All interviews requested by Member States, and also by non-governmental organizations, that wished to have access to the President of the Council were granted. Similarly, briefings by Mexico and Colombia were held on the Council's activities for members of the Rio Group and of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. The President also held talks with the chairmen of the regional groups and provided a steady supply of information to the media to ensure that the work of the Security Council was well disseminated among all concerned. Lastly, the Permanent Mission of Mexico took on the responsibility of posting summaries of the Council's public and closed meetings on its web site for consultation and future reference.

5. The Mexican presidency operated on the basis of the concept of "partnership" within the United Nations to deal with conflict zones and prepared a document entitled "Partnership for a lasting peace" to guide Mexico's position during consultations.

6. During the month of February, agreement was reached among the members on the holding of an interactive wrap-up meeting to summarize the work of the Council. The delegations of Singapore and France contributed to this effort. The

Mexican initiative was based on a proposal, originally submitted by the French delegation, and concluded with a formula focusing the debate on certain matters and encouraging the participation of non-member countries by regional group.

7. Another feature of the Mexican presidency was the flexibility shown in the management of the Council's programme of work. Consultations were held on Liberia due to the intensification of the conflict in that country; a briefing on Cyprus was held to discuss progress in the talks being held by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General; and a public discussion was held on the Middle East in response to the upward spiral of violence in the region and the request submitted by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine and the Group of Arab States.

8. The programme of work for February included:

(a) Twelve formal meetings, during which, among other things, the Council adopted resolution 1394 (2002), extending for two months the mandate of MINURSO, and resolution 1395 (2002), on sanctions against Liberia; at three of these meetings, the President of the Council issued statements on Burundi (S/PRST/2002/3); on the work of Mr. Michael Steiner, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (S/PRST/2002/4); and on the situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/PRST/2002/5). In addition, an open debate was held on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question";

(b) Four closed meetings, at which the Security Council considered the situation in Burundi and the situation in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; met with troop-contributing countries to MINURSO; and assessed its work during the month; and

(c) Agreement on the text of two notes by the President, on the format of the annual report of the Security Council to the General Assembly (S/2002/199) and the establishment of the ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa (S/2002/207).

9. Two major changes were made in the Council's methods of work under Mexico's presidency. The first was the simplification of the annual report of the Security Council to the General Assembly. The second was the establishment of the ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa.

II. Substantive matters

A. Africa

1. The situation in Angola

10. Participants in the public meeting on the humanitarian situation in Angola, held on 13 February, included, in addition to members of the Council, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who reported on the humanitarian situation in Angola; Mr. Erick de Mul, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Angola; Mr. Georges Chikoti, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola; and Ambassador Francisco Seixas da Costa, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United

Nations, who spoke on behalf of the troika of observer States to the Lusaka Protocol.

11. The statements by members of the Council converged on the following points: the need to settle the conflict in the framework of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol; an appeal to the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) to cease its hostilities, especially against civil society, and agree to hold talks with the Government to bring about peace; and an invitation to the Government to improve the living conditions of internally displaced persons, rebuild infrastructure, improve access to humanitarian assistance and establish programmes to ensure respect for the human rights of the Angolan people. The verbatim record of this meeting was issued as document S/PV.4472.

12. On 26 February, the Secretariat briefed the Council on the situation in Angola. This meeting, which consisted only of a report by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Adviser to the Secretary-General for Special Assignments in Africa, was convened because of the death in combat on 22 February of Mr. Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, an event that opened up an unprecedented opportunity for the peace process in Angola.

2. The situation in Burundi

13. The meeting with the President of Burundi, Major Pierre Buyoya, were held in two segments. At the first meeting, the Security Council and all States Members of the United Nations heard a statement by President Buyoya. At a subsequent closed meeting, the Council established an interactive dialogue with the President. The verbatim record of this meeting was issued as document S/PV.4467, and the official communiqué of the closed meeting was issued as document S/PV.4468.

14. The members of the Council noted that the positive events in Burundi were encouraging refugees to return to their homes. They recognized, however, that peace was still being threatened by the activities of armed groups; that the ceasefire was of the highest priority; and that greater pressure must be put on rebel groups to join in the peace efforts. They endorsed the work of President Bongo of Gabon and Deputy President Zuma of South Africa and drew attention to the need to support the efforts to provide assistance to Burundi; to invite the donors to honour their pledges made in Geneva; and to take steps to strengthen the transition process.

15. On 7 February, the President of the Security Council issued statement S/PRST/2002/3 on the basis of a French initiative and after a series of consultations. The verbatim record of this meeting was issued as document S/PV.4471.

3. The situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea

16. The Council sent a mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea from 21 to 25 February. It was headed by Ambassador Peter Kolby, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations. Representatives of the 15 members of the Council participated.

17. The main purpose of the Council's mission was to encourage the parties to continue their implementation of the Algiers Agreements in the context of the current peace process, especially with a view to the decision to be issued by the Boundary Commission at the end of March to demarcate the borders between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

18. The report on the Council's mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea is contained in document S/2002/205.

4. The situation in Liberia

19. On 13 February the members of the Council considered the situation in Liberia. The Secretariat gave a briefing on the political, humanitarian and social situation of the country, and in particular on the conflicts in the north and north-west parts of the country.

20. The President issued a press statement (SC/7301) in which the members of the Council, among other things, deplored the violence and expressed their concern regarding the humanitarian and social situation in Liberia.

21. On 27 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 1395 (2002) to re-establish the Panel of Experts on Liberia for a further period of five weeks to assess the implementation of the sanctions imposed on Liberia. The verbatim record of this meeting was issued as document S/PV.4481.

5. The situation in Madagascar

22. As a follow-up to a meeting held on 28 January, the members of the Council again considered the topic of Madagascar on 27 February. The Secretariat gave a briefing on the situation prevailing in that country.

6. The situation concerning Western Sahara

23. On 19 February, the Secretariat gave a briefing on the legal opinion provided by the Legal Counsel on the legality in the context of international law, including relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and the agreements concerning Western Sahara, of actions allegedly taken by Moroccan authorities consisting in the offering and signing of contracts with foreign companies for the exploration of mineral resources in Western Sahara, which was issued as document S/2002/161. The Secretariat noted that the legal opinion should be dealt with on its own merits, and that it had been the result of a careful investigation.

24. On 25 February, the Council, in compliance with resolution 1353 (2001), met with the troop-contributing countries to MINURSO to hear their reactions to the Secretary-General's proposal on extending the mandate of the mission for two months. Following the meeting, an official communiqué was issued as document S/PV.4477.

25. On 26 February, the Secretariat submitted to the members of the Council the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2002/178). Members of the Council supported the extension of the mandate of MINURSO and opposed the withdrawal of the mission before an agreed settlement was reached by the parties. Following the consultations, the President issued a press statement (SC/7307).

26. On 27 February, Mr. James Baker III, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, said that the Secretary-General's report and the options contained therein reflected frustration that in 11 years it had not been possible to find a lasting solution; he also expressed the view that a consensus solution was impossible. At

the meeting, members reiterated their belief that, to be durable, the solution had to be acceptable to all parties.

27. After the consultations, the Council held a public meeting at which it unanimously adopted resolution 1394 (2002) submitted by the United States of America, on behalf of the Group of Friends, in which it decided to extend the mandate of MINURSO until 30 April 2002 and to consider the options described in the Secretary-General's report as part of its programme of work. The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV.4480.

B. Asia

The situation in Afghanistan

28. At the Council's meeting on 6 February, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, reported on the situation in Afghanistan. Concerning the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, the Special Representative reported that the Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga had already been set up and that the Interim Authority was studying the establishment of a Civil Service Commission.

29. Referring to the establishment of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Special Representative said that the Mission must have a "light footprint", while Afghans must take a leading role in internal affairs. The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV.4469.

30. On the afternoon of 6 February, an Arria formula meeting, chaired by Ireland, was held with Ms. Sadako Ogata, Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Japan and Co-President of the Tokyo Conference, who expressed her views on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and reported on the outcome of the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, held in Tokyo on 21 and 22 January.

31. At the Council's meeting on 27 February, Mr. Kieran Predergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, reported on developments in Afghanistan. He commented on the details of the work done by the Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga, saying that there were fears that armed groups might interfere in the process of selecting and electing delegates to the Loya Jirga. He announced that the Interim Authority had paid the salaries of public servants in February. He reported that the International Security Assistance Force had begun training the first battalion of the new Afghan national army and that Germany was contributing to police training. The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV. 4479.

32. Members of the Security Council had before them the letter dated 4 February 2002 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Council (S/2002/156) and the President's reply dated 8 February 2002 (S/2002/157) concerning the administrative and financial measures necessary to facilitate the establishment and support of an integrated United Nations Mission in Afghanistan. Members of the Council took note of the two letters, on the understanding that the measures taken would be without prejudice to final decisions on the financing of the mission.

C. Europe

1. The situation in Cyprus

33. On 26 February, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, briefed the Council on the first round of direct talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders aimed at the reunification of the island and the cessation of the conflict. He said that the parties to the talks had agreed not to divulge any information on the progress made and noted that if a final agreement was to be reached by June 2002, the parties would have to make a greater effort to settle their differences during the second round of talks. Members of the Council expressed support for the talks taking place between the parties to the conflict and shared the view expressed by the two leaders that it should be the objective to reach agreement by June 2002. A press statement was issued (SC/7308).

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

34. During the informal consultations held on 13 February, members of the Security Council agreed on a draft presidential statement (S/PRST/2002/4), which was read out at a public meeting held the same day. The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV.4473.

35. Members of the Security Council expressed support for the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and appreciation for the work done by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. They called on the political parties to resolve the deadlock over the formation of provisional self-governing institutions and pointed to the need for the province's institutions to be multi-ethnic. They criticized the way in which the Serb minority was being treated. They recalled the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons and called for their return to be encouraged, even by means of economic incentives. They said that it was important to establish the rule of law. Concerning the border demarcation agreement between The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they expressed support for the statements made by the Secretary-General's spokesman on 21 February, which referred to the 7 March 2001 statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2001/7*). The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV.4475.

36. On 28 February, the Secretariat briefed the Security Council on the agreement reached among the three majority Kosovo Albanian parties to nominate the President and Prime Minister of the provisional self-governing institutions, subject to ratification by the Assembly. It reported that Mr. Ibrahim Rugova (Democratic League of Kosovo) would occupy the post of President and Mr. Bajram Rexhepi (Democratic Party of Kosovo) the post of Prime Minister. A draft press statement was agreed.

37. In a press statement (SC/7315), members of the Council expressed satisfaction with the agreement reached in Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on the nomination of the President and Prime Minister, subject to ratification by the Assembly.

D. Middle East

1. The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

38. On 14 February, the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, was considered. In a press statement (SC/7302), members of the Council expressed concern at the continuing violence in the region and shared the expressed dismay of the Secretary-General at the attack on United Nations offices in Gaza. They said that they would continue to hold regular briefings on the situation in the Middle East.

39. On 21 February, the President briefed Council members on his previous day's meetings with the Arab Group troika, headed by the Permanent Representative of Yemen, and separately with the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, both of whom had handed him letters requesting an urgent meeting of the Council to consider the situation in the Middle East (S/2002/182 and S/2002/184).

40. On that occasion, it was decided to hold a Security Council briefing with the Secretary-General and the President of the Council as the only speakers and to postpone a public debate on the question to the following week.

41. At the briefing held the same day, the Secretary-General said that although the news from the Middle East was cause for concern, there was still room for hope. He said that there were new proposals that must be considered immediately by the two sides and by the international community. He emphasized that ending the violence was the overriding priority. He said that the security problem must be addressed in conjunction with other political issues, particularly the question of land, and with economic and social issues, including the Palestinians' worsening living conditions.

42. The President of the Security Council said that the situation in the region entailed serious risks for international security. He expressed regret at the suffering of the civilian population, the loss of human lives and the destruction, and support for the United Nations presence in the region and for the Secretary-General's efforts.

43. On 26 and 27 February, in response to the requests from the Permanent Representative of Yemen and the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, the Council held public meetings to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The verbatim records of these public meetings were published as S/PV.4474, S/PV.4478 and S/PV.4478 (Resumption 1).

2. The situation in Iraq

44. In the Council's informal consultations held on 26 February, the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme, Mr. Benon V. Sevan, reported on the outcome of his visit to Iraq from 14 January to 10 February. He referred to his contacts with various Iraqi officials to discuss the status of the "oil-for-food" programme, emphasizing the importance of meeting the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people.

E. Other matters

Briefing by Mr. Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

45. On 7 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, briefed members of the Security Council on the 21 million refugees and internally displaced persons in the world. He began by recalling 11 September and resolution 1373 (2001), which calls on States to work together to prevent and suppress terrorist acts and to prevent terrorists from gaining admission to countries by abusing the asylum system. He noted that the resolution was consistent with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which specifically excludes persons who have committed serious crimes. The verbatim record of the meeting was published as document S/PV.4470.

III. Working methods

1. Annual report of the Security Council

46. On 13 February, members of the Council considered the draft note on the format of the annual report of the Security Council, which had been negotiated at the expert level within the working group of the Security Council on documentation and procedures. The agreed text was issued as document S/2002/199, which establishes the characteristics of future annual reports of the Council. Although the Council did not succeed in making the report an analytical document, progress was made in improving its presentation. Members agreed that an explanatory document originally annexed to the President's note should be included as an annex to the annual report.

2. Ad Hoc Working Group on Africa

47. As a follow-up to the Presidential statement issued in January as a result of the debate on the situation in Africa (S/PRST/2002/2), which established an ad hoc Working Group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, the terms of reference for that Group were negotiated in February and published as a note by the President of the Security Council (S/2002/207). The ad hoc Group will enable the Council to meet both with the representatives to the United Nations of countries involved in conflicts and with other personalities from regional organizations or civil society. The fact that the Council devotes nearly 80 per cent of its time to African questions makes the Group, which is chaired by an African country, very useful as a body charged with exploring avenues of negotiation more flexibly. The work of this newly created Group will be reviewed six months from its establishment.

48. During the negotiations, three fundamental elements were identified, which were reflected in the President's note:

(a) Enhancement of cooperation between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as with other organs of the United Nations system;

(b) Examination of regional and cross-conflict issues, with a focus on conflict prevention and resolution;

(c) Measures to enhance United Nations cooperation with regional organizations, especially the Organization of African Unity, and subregional organizations.

3. Wrap-up session on the work of the Security Council for the month of February

49. On 20 February, members of the Security Council agreed on the format for the wrap-up session, which was to be a private meeting with a definite agenda and a list of speakers alternating between members and non-members of the Council. It was suggested that statements should be limited to three minutes and that participation should be coordinated among the regional groups. The procedure for the session was disseminated through information notes to missions, contacts with the chairmen of regional groups and the Internet.

50. The agenda was as follows:

(a) Partnership for long-lasting peace: the need for greater coordination among United Nations agencies for conflict prevention and resolution. The Presidency prepared a document with guidelines on this item;

(b) Peace and security in Africa. This item was included because the Council had reviewed the situations in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Western Sahara. It had also negotiated the terms of reference for the establishment of the ad hoc Working Group on Africa.

51. On 28 February, the Council held the wrap-up session, which was attended by 63 delegations of States non-members of the Council. The discussion permitted an interactive dialogue in which members and non-members of the Council took turns in making statements.